VISIT…

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TCM
TURNER CLASSIC MOVIES
CRIME
WAVE
THE FILMGOERS' GUIDE TO THE GREAT CRIME MOVIES
HOWARD HUGHES

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1

'I ain't so tough'

— *The Public Enemy* (1931)

Credits:
DIRECTOR – William A. Wellman
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER – Darryl F. Zanuck
STORY – John Bright and Kubec Glasmon
SCREENPLAY – Kubec Glasmon, John Bright and Harvey Thew
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY – Dev Jennings
EDITOR – Ed McCormick
ART DIRECTOR – Max Parker
COSTUME DESIGNERS – Earl Luick and Edward Stevenson
MUSIC CONDUCTOR – David Mendoza
Black and white
Interiors filmed at Warner Bros
A Warner Bros-Vitaphone production
Released by Warner Bros
84 minutes
Cast:

James Cagney (Tom Powers)/Jean Harlow (Gwen Allen)/Edward Woods (Matt Doyle)/Joan Blondell (Mamie)/Beryl Mercer (Ma Powers)/Donald Cook (Mike Powers, Tom's brother)/Mae Clarke (Kitty)/Mia Marvin (Jane)/Leslie Fenton (Samuel 'Nails' Nathan)/Robert Emmett O'Connor (Patrick J. Ryan, alias Paddy Ryan)/Rita Flynn (Molly Doyle)/Frank Coglan Jnr (Tom as a boy)/Frankie Darrow (Matt as a boy)/Adele Watson (Mrs Doyle)/Murray Kinnell (Putty Nose)/Clark Burroughs (Dutch, member of Ryan's gang)/Robert Homans (Police Officer Pat Burke)/Mia Marvin (Jane, girl at hideout)/Purnell Pratt (Tom's father)/William H. Strauss (Pawnbroker robbed by Tom)/Lee Phelps (Bullied bartender)

* * *

Rico Bandello, alias *Little Caesar*, may have beaten Tom Powers, alias *The Public Enemy*, into theatres, but James Cagney's kinetic portrayal of a psychopathic gangster is pre-eminent among the 'rise and fall' tales of gangsterdom that dominated thirties Hollywood productions. Powers's final revenge for the death of his best friend, walking into the lions' den with a pair of pistols and subsequently staggering into the gutter, bullet-ridden, muttering, 'I ain't so tough', is far more effective than Edward G. Robinson's reedy 'Mother of God – is this the end of Rico?' demise. Cagney is *the* movie gangster and *The Public Enemy* is a pivotal film, though it was not Cagney's first contribution to the genre.

James Cagney was born James Francis Cagney Jnr in New York in 1899; he grew up on the Lower East Side in Yorkville and knew very well the kind of upbringing and background that could 'turn kids bad'. He worked in a variety of jobs, including boxing, but eventually joined a revue, finding his way into the chorus on Broadway in 1920 and from there graduated to lead roles. He appeared in the musical *Penny Arcade* and his first film appearance was recreating this role. Warners' film version, spicily retitled *Sinners' Holiday* (1930), was a carnival romance between a barker and a penny arcade girl. Bit-parts for Cagney followed – his next film was *Doorway to Hell* (1930 – released as the much lighter-sounding *A Handful of Clouds* in the UK), a topical tale of bootleggers, released a month before *Little Caesar* changed the gangster movie map. Lew Ayres starred as the kingpin, with Cagney as his henchman. Cagney also made *Other Men's Women* (1931 – a railroad drama) and *The Millionaire* (1931 – Cagney's first comedy), before screen-testing for the role of Matt Doyle in *The Public Enemy*. Young actor Edward Woods was to play the lead, Tom Powers, but almost immediately director William A. Wellman realised the actors were in the wrong roles and reversed them. The casting swap of Cagney and Woods is most apparent with the two young actors who were chosen to play Tom and Matt as children. Frankie Darro (as Matt) is a dead ringer for a young Cagney, while Frank Coglan Jnr (as Tom) closely resembles Woods.

The Public Enemy was based on the novelette 'Beer and Blood' by Baltimore-born John Bright, who had been a crime reporter in Chicago, the setting for his story. Bright's unauthorised biography of Chicago's mayor, 'Hizzoner Big Bill Thomson', led to him being sued by the mayor. *The Public Enemy* was his first film script. He wrote it with Kubec Glasmon, a Polish-born pharmacist, who became his writing partner at Warners, with the novel's dialogue adapted by Harvey Thew.

In the story, Tom Powers and Matt Doyle grow up together in Chicago. As slum urchins they fall into petty crime and when they grow up become involved with a small-timer named Putty Nose, who convinces them to take part in a robbery on the Northwestern Fur Trading Company. The job is a mess and in making their escape, Tom kills a policeman. Putty Nose vanishes and leaves Tom and Matt to face the music. The pair become involved with Irish racketeer Paddy Ryan, a bootlegger and liquor-runner, who is in business with Nails Nathan, a dapper mobster from 'the West Side'. Tom and Matt rise through the ranks of racketeers

and become rich and notorious (when they catch up with Putty Nose, Tom executes him); all the while, Tom tells his mother that he is working in local politics, until his disapproving elder brother Mike discovers otherwise. Nails Nathan is killed in a freak riding accident and rival 'Schemer' Burns and his mobsters try to muscle in on his turf. In an ambush, Matt is machine-gunned down and Tom goes looking for revenge, attacking Burns's headquarters and killing the kingpin, but getting badly injured. While he recovers in hospital, Tom is kidnapped by the Burns faction; one night, as his mother prepares the bed for his homecoming, his brother answers the door and Tom's trussed-up corpse flops face down into the hallway.

The Great American Depression of the thirties, with falling output and massive unemployment (at some points 33 per cent of the population), coincided with the new vogue for gangster movies, spearheaded by Warner Brothers' Studio. The recent advent of sound meant that you could hear screeching wheels, approaching sirens and Thomson Submachine-gun fire and the wisecracking, quick-fire dialogue crackled with menace. When *The Public Enemy* was made, the US was still under the rules of the Volstead Prohibition (1920–1933) and the protagonists' activities were remarkably contemporary. Jack Warner liked to make films that had

Early thirties Warners promotional portrait, published in the *Picturegoer* series, of fresh-faced James Cagney: Public Enemy Number One.

contemporary social thrust. The Prohibition act outlawed the manufacture, distribution or retail of alcohol. This led to bootlegging, or 'alky-cooking', as depicted in *The Public Enemy*, where organised crime, financed by illegal booze, resulted in inter-gang rivalry and turf wars (a bootlegger was originally a wild-west term referring to the way traders carried bottles of firewater in their boots to sell to the Indians). *The Public Enemy* is set between 1909 and 1920. The date captions include 1915 (the year of the fur heist), wartime 1917 (the US declaration and Mike enlisting in the Marines) and the Prohibition scenes in 1920, which begin with a sign in the Family Liquor Store – 'Owing to prohibition, our entire stock must be sold by midnight' – prompting a stampede by the locals to fill every available vessel with 'hooch'.

Director William Augustus Wellman had previously made the silent World War I film *Wings*, which won the very first Best Picture Academy Award in 1927 (it was re-released in 1929 with sound). In *The Public Enemy* Wellman cast Liverpudlian Leslie Fenton as spruce gangster Nails Nathan; Fenton himself later became a director in the fifties. Mae Clarke, who in the most famous scene in the film has a grapefruit thrust in her face, also appeared in James Whales's *Frankenstein* (1931), as Henry Frankenstein's fiancée, Elizabeth. Errol Flynn lookalike Edward Woods, the victim of Cagney's promotion to leading man, was only appearing in his second film (his debut had been in *Mother's Cry* – 1930) and his film career was short-lived. By contrast, Joan Blondell, as Matt's girl Mamie, had appeared with Cagney in *Sinners' Holiday* (her Warners' debut) and *Other Men's Women*, and was one of the most popular and prolific actresses of the era.

The most famous of Cagney's co-stars was Jean Harlow, the original platinum blonde screen goddess, who had caused a stir in *Hell's Angels* (1930) – her looks were so influential that the two movies she made after *The Public Enemy* were *Goldie* and *Platinum Blonde* (both 1931). She died tragically in 1937, aged 26, of a cerebral oedema (fluid on the brain), but her iconic impact was immense.

In 1928, Warners had bought the Stanley Corporation of America, owner of 250 cinemas across the US, and First National, another chain. *The Public Enemy* was filmed at Warner Bros' Studios between January and February 1931; Vitaphone's involvement was the relatively current sound-mixing elements and the Vitaphone Orchestra, conducted by David Mendoza, recorded the score. The Warners' Studios had formerly been First National Studios, which had been wired for sound in 1928. *The Public Enemy* features several authentic street-scene sets (with drays piled with kegs, a Salvation Army band and kids on the sidewalk swigging beer) and some stock location footage of railways, cattle pens and thriving streets choked with trams, automobiles, horse-drawn carriages and pedestrians. Interiors accurately evoked the era, with one sign in a spit-and-sawdust social club warning: 'Don't Spit On the Floor!'

During the making of the film, Cagney had a near miss during a machine-gun ambush; real bullets peppered the cornerstone of a building and one almost hit the

actor (a hazard of filmmaking that recurred in *Angels With Dirty Faces*). The scene when Cagney pushes a grapefruit into Mae Clarke's face, after she accuses him of being unfaithful, was based on a real-life incident involving Chicago gangster Hymie Weiss, who used an omelette. On set it was decided that a grapefruit would be a good substitute. There are three versions of how the scene was filmed. Initially Cagney was going to throw it, but Wellman and Cagney changed their minds when Clarke would only allow them one take. Alternatively, Clarke had a cold and wanted to fake the shot with a stand-in, but the director insisted they do it for real, much to Clarke's displeasure. Finally, the most widely believed and plausible version was that Clarke and Cagney were larking around on set and the scene was never meant to appear in the finished film.

A brief foreword introduces the film's moral stance on 'the evils associated with prohibition'. Following the titles (accompanied by a staccato march arrangement of the standard 'I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles') we are introduced to each character, captioned with their character names: Tom mimes a punch (a gesture he repeats throughout the film) and Matt wipes his nose on his sleeve (his trademark, presumably in a joking effort to 'keep it clean'). Another caption then says the film is about to 'honestly depict an environment that exists today in a certain strata of American life', rather than 'glorify the hoodlum or the criminal'. In the US, the Hayes Code was introduced in 1930, which led to much more stringent censorship restrictions; until then films were covered by a simple do's and don'ts outline. Under the new guidelines, *The Public Enemy*, without such a disclaimer, would have clearly breached the code.

Playing safe, Warner Brothers Pictures claim that the story is true, but 'all names and characters appearing therein are purely fictional'. Many of the film's events were based on Charles Dion 'Deannie' O'Banion, an Irish Catholic mobster, and his gang, the Irish North Siders in Chicago (O'Banion was executed in classic gangland fashion in his florist's shop, when a rival mobster's men called in to collect a specially ordered wreath). In *The Public Enemy*, the brutal scene when Tom Powers shoots Rajah, the horse that kicked Nails Nathan in the head, is inspired by a true incident from the career of Louis 'Two Gun' Altieri, an O'Banion hoodlum. Nails Nathan was based on Samuel J. 'Nails' Morton; Morton was killed when his horse threw him and trampled him to death. Altieri, plus three other O'Banion men, kidnapped the horse, took it to the scene of the accident and shot it dead in revenge.

The central relationship between Tom and Matt, from teens to tombstone, is well delineated by Cagney and Woods. They begin as kids, having a crafty swig of beer on the street outside a saloon and with petty pilfering from department stores, but with maturity comes responsibility and far more serious crimes. The fur robbery is scotched by edgy Tom taking a shot at a stuffed bear caught in the torchlight. The shot alerts the police, who shoot the getaway driver, Lippy Larry. As they escape, Tom commits his first murder, with a Smith and Wesson given to him by Putty Nose – an exploitative and untrustworthy fence who even tried to

swindle them when they were kids. As Tom notes later, 'You taught us how to cheat, steal and kill… If it hadn't been for you, we might've been on the level.' Following the fur robbery, Larry's wake is a poignant moment that sees sheepish Tom and Matt introduced as 'some of Larry's nicer friends', while elder relatives tut that Larry was 'a no-good boy'.

Prompted by alcohol being sold for $30 a gallon, they begin in the illicit liquor trade. Working for Irish bootlegger Paddy Ryan, they set up a brewing company (Lehman's) with Nails Nathan and his pack of hoods, making sure that local pubs and saloons 'buy our beer or they don't buy any beer'. Tom and Matt are the 'trouble squad', the muscle, threatening bartenders that if they don't comply, they will drop by and 'kick your teeth out, one at a time'. Their first foray into bootleg robbery is one of the film's highlights. Having cased the layout while working as deliverymen, the gang arrives at the booze warehouse in a tanker truck marked GASOLINE. Two cohorts pose as telegraph men and climb into the building, put taps on the storage kegs and syphon the beer into the tanker with a length of hosepipe.

Tom's relationship with women (his mother excepted) and the awkwardness of the romantic scenes are *The Public Enemy*'s biggest failing. Apart from his *grapefruit-à-tête* with Kitty, Tom's snappy dating technique sees him uttering the immortal lines, 'Hello baby, you're a swell dish – I think I'm going to go for you!' with his 'date' seemingly having little say in the matter. His relationship with Harlow, as out-of-town Texan 'merry-go-round' Gwen, is more complicated, but he certainly isn't in love, and she eventually decides to skip town. By contrast, Matt and Mamie get married; 'Matt's decided to take something lawful… a wife,' jokes Nails. But the night of their celebration is the night they run into Putty Nose again and the party is forestalled. It seems the bond between the two men is the singularly most important factor in their lives.

As the voice of the film's moral stance, so as not to make *The Public Enemy* too attractive to moviegoers deprived of drink and low on cash, Wellman has Tom's brother Mike. Their father is a police officer, but even when they were kids it was Tom to whom he had to 'give the strap'. As adults, with their father dead, Mike discovers Tom's nefarious activities from policeman Pat Burke and refuses any kindness from his brother; even a keg at Mike's homecoming from the war is described as being filled with 'beer and blood'. Later, Tom brings his family some money, but Mike has other ideas – 'Get an earful of this: that money's blood money and we want no part of it.' Tom says money is valueless to him (which suggests he does his job for enjoyment). His brother answers, 'With no heart and no brains it's all you've got… you'll need it.' Unfortunately this is not an entirely convincing argument: Mike works as a 'ding-ding' on tramcars, joins the war-bound Marines, comes back a shaking wreck and goes to night school (in Tom's words, 'learning how to be poor'). Tom meanwhile drinks beer and champagne throughout the decade-long drought, gets the girls, dances in tuxedos and drives the largest convertible ever seen on film. But his brother's pontificating is shown to be moral,

when Tom's corpse is delivered to their doorstep, trussed up with rope, still in the hospital blanket and bloodied head bandage: mummified and ready for entombment. In the background, a gramophone plays 'I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles', then reaches the repetitive click of the endless run-out groove.

We don't actually see Tom's death, and for a film that is so black-hearted, there is surprisingly little on-screen violence perpetrated by the Public Enemy. Wellman keeps the most graphic instants of death to the narrative margins, supplying all we need to know from actors' reactions to events off-screen. When Tom finds out Putty has run out on them, he whines: 'Why that dirty, no good yellow-bellied stool… I'm gonna give it that Putty Nose right in the head, first time I see him.' When Tom and Matt do catch up with him, Putty tries to rekindle their friendship with a sense of nostalgia; he even plays a song from the good old days in the Red Oaks Social Club. As the camera follows Matt to the door, Tom shoots Putty off-screen; our only indication of the events are a gunshot and a discordant piano crescendo as Putty slumps on the keyboard.

The more conventional action scenes, like the moment Ryan's premises are obliterated by grenades tossed from Burns's speeding cars, offset the crueller elements of the film and reinforce its authenticity. Though some of the tough-guy

Rise and Fall: Tom (James Cagney) and Gwen (Jean Harlow) living the high life in William A. Wellman's *The Public Enemy* (1931).

language has dated badly ('Are you looking for a smack on the button?'/'Four pineapples tossed at us in three days'), the list of brutality is potent, especially for a film of 1931. Any film that can boast a protagonist who shoots people in the back, kills cops, lies to his mother, threatens bartenders, hits women and shoots a racehorse is violent fare for any era. Cagney was so effective in his portrayal of Tom Powers that by 1933 the Production Code Authority stated that gangsters should not be idolised or glamorised in the cinema; in 1935 Cagney himself made *G-Men*, starring as a gangbusting government agent, to redress the balance.

Tom is a cocky, grinning punk, who bullies the opposition and, until the final gun battle, always wins – unfair and square. The baby-faced gangster is turned by Cagney's gracefulness and élan into an angelic killer, for whom we almost feel sympathy in the dénouement; in one extraordinary moment the ex-dancer executes a light-footed pirouette, with a couple of half-skips thrown in, as he gets back in his car after chatting up Gwen. Later, at the ambush, the image of him standing in the lashing rain, waiting for Schemer Burns's mob to arrive at their 'front', the 'Western Chemical Company', is one of the film's most effective. Tom can hardly contain his loathing, Cagney's face sneering and twitchy, overcome with hatred and a feral instinct for revenge; just like when they were kids, when he was described as 'the meanest boy in town'. As the rival mob emerge from two cars and file in, Tom purposefully walks across the street, hands on pistols in his jacket pockets, collar up, hat low, and bursts in, unleashing his vitriol in a fusillade of shots. A moment later he emerges; in the background, screams and moans from Burns's crew follow in his wake. No more the angel, he staggers, bloody and drenched. Tom throws both his pistols through the shop windows and collapses in the gutter with the realisation 'I ain't so tough…' A final epilogue sternly gives the audience something to think about on the way home: 'The end of Tom Powers is the end of every hoodlum. The Public Enemy is not a man, nor is it a character – it is a problem that sooner or later, WE, the public, must solve!' No wonder it was called the Great Depression.

The Public Enemy was released in 1931. The trailer simply featured a pistol firing directly at the screen, with the slogan 'A few scenes cannot do justice to the most powerful picture of the year'. Posters depicted Harlow and Cagney embracing, or Cagney brandishing a pistol, with the effective tagline 'The Killer-Boss who Riddled, Roared and Terror-reigned his way across the DECADE OF DEATH'. For her prominent deployment in the publicity, Harlow is actually only on screen for three scenes. The film was condemned for its violence; even if most of it happens off-screen, the savage implication is clear. *Picture Play* called the film 'a grim and terrible document, with no attempt to soften or humanise the character. Of all racketeer films it is the most brutal and least like movie fiction. For this reason it is the most arresting.' *Time* magazine reckoned the film's intensity was 'relieved by scenes of the central characters slugging bartenders and slapping their women across the face. US audiences, long trained by the press to glorify thugs,

last week laughed loudly at such comedy and sat spellbound through the serious parts.' Of the finale *Time* noted that it 'carries to its ultimate absurdity the fashion for romanticising gangsters, for even in defeat the public enemy is endowed with grandeur'. It was a huge hit in the US, even though Warner Bros were currently operating at a net loss of $7,918,604 – but it was the Depression and the studio did not begin to show a profit until 1935.

The original US print distributed ran 96 minutes, but all subsequent releases have been 84; TV prints from the seventies list the running time as 90 minutes. When it went for its general release in Britain, self-censorship was rife and the film was refused a certificate. In a famous case, Beckenham Council had its own film censorship board in the early thirties and banned nine films, including Paul Muni's *Scarface* and *The Public Enemy*. The latter was after the grapefruit scene had already been removed by the British censors; in another example, a moral-minded Cornish borough council took it upon itself to ban films throughout the decade, even though it didn't have a single cinema. *The Public Enemy* was retitled *Enemies of the Public* for the UK, broadening the focus to Tom and Matt, and their attendant mobsters' rogues gallery. Everywhere else the film was known by literal translations of its title: *Nemico Publico* in Italy; *Der Öffentliche Feind* in Germany.

Glasmon and Bright were nominated for an Oscar for Best Original Story for their work on *The Public Enemy* (John Monk Sanders won for *The Dawn Patrol*). They worked at Warners for the next few years and wrote several Cagney vehicles: *Smart Money* (1931); *Blonde Crazy* (1931 – with Cagney and Blondell as con artists masquerading as a bellhop and a maid); *The Crowd Roars* (1932 – Howard Hawks's motor racing drama) and *Taxi!* (1932). In 1933 Bright and Glasmon were two of the founders of the Screen Writers Guild and Bright was later blacklisted by the House of Un-American Activities. Bright also collaborated again with Harvey Thew; their greatest success was adapting 'Diamond Lil' to the screen for Mae West at Paramount as *She Done Him Wrong* (1933); made for $200,000 in 18 days, it grossed $3 million.

With the runaway success of *Little Caesar* and *The Public Enemy*, Robinson and Cagney were teamed in their next movie, the mediocre *Smart Money* (1931), with Robinson as a barber with a sideline in gambling and Cagney as his sidekick. The film also featured Boris Karloff, and was a massive success; it was the only time the two gangster greats co-starred together. In 1931, Cagney was on $450 a week, according to his Warners' contract. Shortly after the success of *The Public Enemy* he refused to work until it was revised: this resulted in a new five-year, $1000-a-week deal. In an indication of his power, Cagney pulled the same stunt in 1932. He lobbied for even more money, finally winning his case and earning $1,750 per week. Cagney's output throughout the thirties was generally average in quality, but he remained popular; typical was the boxing saga *The Irish in Us* (1935). He made *Lady Killer* (1933), which reunited him with Mae Clarke and Leslie Fenton from *The Public Enemy*, and parodied his tough-guy image. In *Taxi* (1932) Cagney

uttered his most famous line, a favourite with Cagney impersonators, and anyone who narrowed their eyes, clenched their teeth and whined, 'Come out and take it… you dirty rat'.

One legacy of *The Public Enemy* was that Cagney never again had to buy a grapefruit – every time he walked into a restaurant, someone would send one over. Although Cagney worked hard, and even played a good guy in the highly successful *G-Men* (1935 – by which time he had hiked his salary up to $4,500 per week), it was seven years before Cagney made a film to equal *The Public Enemy*'s impact, and for that role he would once more have to play an angel with a dirty face.

2

'Just rushing towards death'

— *High Sierra* (1941)

Credits:
DIRECTOR – Raoul Walsh
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER – Hal B. Wallis
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER – Mark Hellinger (for First National)
STORY – W.R. Burnett
SCREENPLAY – John Huston and W.R. Burnett
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY – Tony Gaudio
EDITOR – Jack Killifer
ART DIRECTOR – Ted Smith
COSTUME DESIGNER – Milo Anderson
MUSIC COMPOSER – Adolph Deutsch
Black and white
Interiors filmed at Warner Bros Studios
A Warner Bros-First National production
Released by Warner Bros
100 minutes
Cast:
Ida Lupino (Marie Garson)/Humphrey Bogart ('Mad Dog' Roy Earl)/Alan Curtis ('Babe' Kozak)/Arthur Kennedy ('Red' Hattery)/Joan Leslie (Velma)/Henry Hull ('Doc' Banton)/Henry Travers (Pa Goodhue)/Elizabeth Risdon (Ma Goodhue)/Barton MacLane (Jake Kranmer, the ex-cop)/Jerome Cowan (Healy, reporter from the *Bulletin*)/Minna Gombell (Mrs Baughmann)/Cornel Wilde (Louis Mendoza)/Willie Best (Algernon)/Donald McBride (Big Mac)/Paul Harvey (Mr Baughmann)/Isabel Jewell ('Blonde', Jake's girl)/Spencer Charters (Ed, gas station owner)/John Elredge (Lon Preiser, Velma's beau)/George Meeker (Pfiffer, victim of car accident)/Robert Strange (Art)/Sam Haynes (Radio Announcer at siege)/Frank Cordell (Slim, the sniper)/Zero the Dog (Pard)

* * *

Based on Chicago author William Riley Burnett's book of the same name, *High Sierra* reveals how much the gangster hero had matured in the 10 years since the screen version of Burnett's *Little Caesar* and Cagney's Tom Powers in *The Public Enemy*. Roy Earle, a lifer, wins a pardon and is released from Mossmore Prison, Chicago, but finds that he is out of step with the times. He visits Jake Kranmer, an ex-cop, who informs him that he has been sprung from prison by his old boss, Big Mac, who has him earmarked for a job. Earle travels out to Shaw's Camp, a fishing resort in the High Sierras of California, and meets the gang: drinker 'Babe' Kozak, jumpy 'Red' Hattery and Marie, a refugee from LA who is tagging along with the duo. Earle discovers that they are to knock over the strong boxes in the luxury Tropico Hotel Resort, which at the height of the horseracing season will be brimming with diamonds. Their insider will be Louis Mendoza, who works at the hotel.

When the gang carry out the job, they clear the boxes, but Earle shoots a cop and they flee in two cars; the one carrying Red, Babe and Mendoza careers off the road and only Mendoza survives. On the run with the diamonds, Earle and Marie find that Big Mac has died and Kranmer is a turncoat, so Earle kills him – but is wounded in the process. While waiting for the fence to sell on the diamonds, Mendoza squeals, so Earle puts Marie on a bus to safety. With roadblocks springing up across the region, Earle is chased by the police back into the sierras, but a closed road forces him to abandon his car. He hides out in the mountains but is trapped; Marie hears the news on the radio and goes to the siege, in time to see Earle killed by a sniper. Woven into the story is a subplot revealing a completely different side to Earle. On his way to Shaw's Camp, he meets a couple and their granddaughter Velma travelling to LA. Earle becomes attached to Velma, who has a club foot. Once in LA, Earle pays for an operation to have her ankle corrected, and asks her to marry him, but she tells him she is in love with Lon, from back east, humiliating Earle and destroying what little faith he has in human nature.

Toupee-wearing, 41-year-old Humphrey De Forest Bogart had appeared in many movies throughout the thirties, usually in a supporting role, and mostly in gangster flicks. Warners cast him in *The Petrified Forest* (1936) as 'Duke' Mantee, a killer on the loose from prison, and it proved to be his breakthrough role. He also appeared in *Bullets or Ballots* (1936), with Edward G. Robinson as a cop who pretends to be disgraced and infiltrates the underworld. Between 1936 and 1940, Bogart made 28 films; because of his contract he was seldom given a choice as to which assignments he took, which explains his awful appearance as the black-clad bandit Whip McCord in the western *The Oklahoma Kid* (1939), with James Cagney. Bogart had to deliver lines such as 'Fork over dem moneybags' and recalled that his co-star's large white hat made him look like 'a mushroom'. He also appeared with Cagney in the documentary-styled *The Roaring Twenties* (1939) and as the

truck driver brother of George Raft in *They Drive by Night* (1940 – *The Road to Frisco* in the UK), both for director Raoul Walsh. Bogart tended to get lead roles turned down by other actors and *High Sierra* was no exception. The role of Earle was offered to Warners' crime greats – Muni, Cagney and Robinson – but they all refused. Raft passed because he didn't want to die at the end, so the role was Bogart's.

One-eyed Raoul Walsh had started as an actor and assistant to D.W. Griffith, appearing as assassin John Wilkes Booth in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). Working at Warners from 1939 to 1951, he made some of their most famous films of the time, including *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924) starring Douglas Fairbanks and *The Big Trail* (1930) with John Wayne. He would later work with Errol Flynn (*They Died with Their Boots On* and *Objective Burma!*) and made the gangster classic *White Heat* with Cagney in 1949.

Opposite Bogart, Walsh cast Ida Lupino, a striking actress and powerful screen presence, who had reproachful eyes and a sense of inner sadness that defined her screen persona. The pair had just appeared together in the successful *They Drive*

Mad Dog Earle: Humphrey Bogart in John Huston's *High Sierra* (1941).

by Night; Lupino played the wife of a trucking baron in love with Raft, whose brother (Bogart) loses his arm in an accident. Born in London and trained at RADA, Lupino had made her film debut aged 15 in *Her First Affaire* (1933), a Lolita-type role for which her actress mother, Connie Emerald, had also been in the running. In Hollywood from 1934 on contract at Paramount, she was signed by Warners in 1940, but found herself typecast as molls and villains. Of Marie in *High Sierra*, Lupino said, 'It was a damn good role… Bogart was a killer and no good and I was in love with him. Perfectly normal and natural for us.'

Imposing former male model Alan Curtis played thuggish 'Babe' Kozak. Arthur Kennedy, as 'Red' Hattery, was brought to Hollywood by James Cagney, to star in *City for Conquest* (1940) as Cagney's sensitive brother; *High Sierra* was only his second film, but he went on to make movies for the next five decades. Joan Leslie debuted on stage aged nine, and made several films in her teens under her real name of Joan Brodel. In 1941 she was signed by Warner Bros, and her role as selfish Velma in *High Sierra* was her contract debut. For *High Sierra*, Cornel Wilde was also on contract at Warners, but was constantly typecast as a heavy; he later left for 20th Century Fox and comparative fame, playing the lead in several successful pictures, including the cult crime classic *The Big Combo* (1955). Willie Best, as Algernon, had made a series of unfunny comedies under the derogatory stage name 'Sleep 'n Eat' and his sketchy portrayal in *High Sierra* did little to improve role models for black actors in Hollywood in the thirties and forties. Henry Hull, as 'Doc' Banton, was a reliable character actor, who appeared in *The Werewolf of London* (1935), *Jesse James* (1939), *The Return of Frank James* (1940) and later Hitchcock's *Lifeboat* (1944) and *Objective Burma!* (1945).

The crisp script was written by Burnett in collaboration with John Huston, who struck up a friendship with Bogart on set during the film's making. Warners allotted the film a modest $455,000 budget. *They Drive by Night*, Bogart and Lupino's previous film, was budgeted at $500,000. Filming began on 5 August 1940. The desert and car chase sequences were shot in the Alabama Hills, around Lone Pine, California; the area in the vicinity of Lone Pine and Independence was a popular location for shooting westerns. The 'Tropico Hotel Resort' was the Arrowhead Springs Hotel in San Bernardino (near Lake Arrowhead). Other scenes were shot at Warner Brothers Studios, Burbank; Stage 19 at Warners was transformed into the Tropico Hotel lobby for the robbery scene. Shaw's Camp was filmed on location, with cabin interiors at Warners. For the climax of the film the crew travelled to the High Sierra region of east-central California, to shoot the location scenes around Mount Whitney (then the highest peak in the US). The crew's equipment had to be brought in on horses and pack-mules. Stuntman Buster Wiles played both the dying Roy Earle (plummeting down the slope) and Slim, the sniper who kills him. Bogart was irascible on location and Walsh dubbed him 'Bogie the Beefer'. After a 44-day shoot, the film wrapped in September.

Some sources claim that 'Mad Dog' Roy Earle was based on a real-life member of the Dillinger gang. In Burnett's book, he's named Roy Earldon and Dillinger is

name-checked in the film. Earle is probably the unluckiest gangster of all time. The robbery fails because of his cohorts' inexperience; as Earle says, 'Small-timers for small jobs… this one was just too big.' Earle falls in love with a girl who doesn't love him, finances her corrective surgery and then watches her selfishly run off with someone else. To Earle she's 'pretty… and decent', but he's only half right.

Earle's gang – which he's presented with, rather than chooses – are a bunch of 'jitterbugs', nervous and inexperienced. Babe is a drunken bruiser with a temper, Red is jumpy but keen and Mendoza is the one most likely to foul up. Earle doesn't like him at all: 'The cops'll punch him and he'll sing' – and of course he does. The gang are honoured to be in such 'fast company', but the reality is they're out of their depth. As 'Doc' Banton, himself a crook, now involved in 'the health racket', notes of Earle, 'You may catch lead any minute.' There aren't many of the 'old bunch' left (at least the good ones) and Earle himself concedes: 'All the A-one guys are gone… dead or in Alcatraz.' Even Big Mac, the brains behind the operation, is worn out and dying, 'like a kid's toy that's running down'. This sense of the end of the great gangsters is unusually melancholic for a genre piece, a melancholy that resonates in the film's finale.

The robbery itself is well handled by Walsh, with Huston and Burnett's hard-boiled dialogue adding to the planning and execution of the heist, and the subsequent manhunt. They hear there are 'plenty of rocks in the strongbox' and Earle calmly cases the joint with a tennis racket tucked under his arm, rather than a machine-gun (which he keeps hidden, according to genre convention, in a violin case). Later Big Mac is found 'cold as a mackerel' and Earle goes on the run. The frantic car chase into the sierras is an action highlight, with the dusty convoy of police motorbikes and squad cars zooming though the desert and up winding mountain hairpins, captured by Walsh's 360-degree pivoting camera. For these pursuit scenes, the camera was under-cranked, to increase the speed of the vehicles, with the rapidly swirling dust a give-away.

The final stand-off beneath Mount Whitney is presented as a media circus, with the cops and sharpshooters mingling with hyperbolic newsmen; 'One is awestruck by the gruesomeness of this rendezvous with death,' says one announcer. Nearly out of ammo, Earle hunkers down behind the rocks, while the law sends Slim, a sniper with a high-powered rifle and telescopic sight, to manoeuvre behind the fugitive. When Marie refuses to help the police negotiate a surrender, Pard, their dog, hears Earle's voice and scurries up the mountain. Seeing the dog, Earle rushes out looking for Marie and allows the sniper a shot at his back. Newspaper headlines have christened Earle 'Mad Dog'; over his corpse, a bystander sneers, 'Big-shot Earle… he ain't much now is he?' He's a tough man and a killer, and killers must be seen to pay. The ending, with sobbing Marie carrying Pard towards the camera, is pure melodrama, but is very effective nonetheless.

But it is this wistfully sentimental aspect of the film, and of Earle's personality in particular, where the film really scores, and where Huston's involvement is most

prevalent. Bogart could sleepwalk through performances as a cold-blooded convict and bank robber, but to colour his portrayal of Earle to elicit sympathy for 'Mad Dog' was impressive. There are references to Earle's childhood as a farm boy in Indiana; on his way to the sierras, he nostalgically visits his old house, as though he senses that time is running out. Earle's first action when he gets out of prison is to go to the park and reassure himself that nothing has changed in the outside world. But Earle is kidding himself: the world is very different. While he sits in the park, a discarded newspaper tells us who this character really is: 'Desperado Released – Roy Earle, Famous Indiana Bank Robber, Wins Pardon'.

Earle's sympathetic relationship with club-footed Velma would have been unthinkable in earlier Bogart incarnations. She knows him as 'Roy Collins', staying 'up in the mountains for my health'. Perhaps because of his duplicity, their relationship is doomed. For his kindness in paying $400 for her operation, her grandfather says that Roy is 'The best man who ever lived', but 'Doc' Banton, quoting Dillinger, notes that men like Earle are 'just rushing toward death'. Earle and Velma are completely mismatched. She has a sweetheart back home named Lon and as soon as she is well, she is seen in gaudy dress and makeup. She wants to 'live a little' and is soon to marry Lon. 'That's swell,' says Roy with a face like thunder. These and other scenes in the film show Earle for the 'sap' he is – too trusting of human nature and equally resentful when he is treated untrustworthily.

Marie is his salvation and soulmate. During the making of the film, Bogart said to Lupino, 'You and I were born to be bad, but we're really saints, Ida'; Lupino replied: 'Who? You and me? Impossible! The halos wouldn't fit … our horns would be enormous!' Earle's relationship with Marie starts off on the wrong foot. Warily, he doesn't want her as part of the gang, but gradually she, and Pard, the stray mutt she adopts, become a surrogate family to Earle – Pard's 'got no home, got nobody' either. As they set off on the robbery Pard follows them and Marie pleads that he be allowed to come along. 'Of all the 14-carat saps,' says Earle, 'starting out on a caper with a woman and a dog.' But he grows to like her, especially after his treatment by Velma, and later, he places one of the rings stolen from the Tropico on the little finger of Marie's left hand; a gesture that reduces her to tears of joy: 'Of course, you would put it on the wrong finger,' she fusses.

There was a rumour around Shaw's Camp that Pard was bad luck. Earle and Marie initially laugh off such suggestions, but the way events unfold they begin to suspect they are indeed jinxed, Earle finally rattily conceding, 'OK, it's all Pard's fault.' Bogart's own dog Zero played Pard. In the final scene, Earle's riddled corpse is played by stuntman Buster Wiles, with cookies hidden in his palm, so the dog licks the dead man's hand. Finally, as Earle has 'crashed out' and is free, the dog remains by his master, a silent goodbye – and Marie, in tears, loves him too.

Prior to *High Sierra*'s release, the stars' billing was reversed. Bogart was originally to have received top billing, but Lupino was promoted by the studio – Bogart, who took the project partly because it was his first starring role, wasn't very

impressed. *High Sierra* was premiered in the US on 21 January 1941 and put on general release the following week. The poster was an exciting depiction of the mountaintop shootout, with the line 'He killed… and there on the crest of Sierra's Highest Crag… He Must Be Killed!' Reviewers were gushing; the *Motion Picture Herald* noted that 'By painting a character with streaks of white which do not dilute the black, Huston and Burnett drive home their point with power and conviction'. The *New York Times* said the film had 'Speed, excitement, suspense and that ennobling suggestion of futility that makes for irony and pity'. Less seriously, the *New Republic* noted: 'This is what I should call a film worth exposing negative for… like it or not, I'll be damned if you leave before the end or go to sleep'. As part of the film's promotion, Bogart and his wife Mayo (known as 'the Battling Bogarts') undertook two weeks' worth of lucrative public appearances at Warners' prestigious first-run cinema, the Strand. A stage show review followed each evening's showing of *High Sierra*, with other performers including the stars of TV's *Ozzie and Harriet* and an Egyptian magician called Galli Galli. The film was a huge success in the US, but still didn't gross as well as Raft's and Cagney's films, which irked Bogart. In the UK, it was rated an A. The film was renamed throughout

Warners Bros' publicity still of two-gun Humphrey Bogart.

Europe: in Italy it was *Un Pallottola per Roy* ('A Bullet for Roy'); in Spain *El Ultimo Refugio* ('The Last Refuge'); and in Germany *Entscheidung in der Sierra* ('Decision in the Sierra'). In France it was known as *La Grande Évasion*: 'The Great Escape'.

Walsh remade *High Sierra* in 1949 in a western setting as *Colorado Territory* starring Joel McCrea and Virginia Mayo as the lovers (Mayo played a half-breed squaw), and Dorothy Malone as Velma. Another remake, *I Died a Thousand Times* (1955), also released by Warner Brothers, starred Jack Palance in the Roy Earle role, Shelley Winters as Marie, Lori Nelson as Velma, Lee Marvin as Babe, Earl Holliman as Red and Lon Chaney Jnr as Big Mac. It was written for the screen by Burnett and photographed in CinemaScope and WarnerColor. Palance overacts as usual; the film's success rests very much on your tolerance of Palance, and the strong supporting cast helps.

Sam Peckinpah's *The Getaway* (1972), based on a novel by crime writer Jim Thomson, was Steve McQueen's homage to *High Sierra*, with its robbery and chase structure. McQueen, as bank robber Doc McCoy, even dons a black Bogart-style suit and visits the park immediately following his release from the Texas penitentiary, with his wife Carol (Ali MacGraw). He plans the robbery of the First Bank of Beacon City, but the job goes awry. Doc and Carol flee towards Mexico with the proceeds, but vengeful hoods and the cops are in hot pursuit. Filmed with familiar Peckinpah élan, memorable scenes include shotgun-wielding Doc's slow-motion destruction of a squad car and the El Paso finale, when the hoods catch up with Doc for a hotel showdown. With McQueen and MacGraw on top form, *The Getaway* was a box-office smash, grossing $19 million in the US.

In 1941, Bogart and Lupino were to have starred again together in their next film, *The Gentle People*. For whatever reason Warners couldn't get them back together and the film was eventually made without Bogart (replaced by John Garfield) as *Out of the Fog*. Garfield played a crook who robs two elderly men of their savings for a fishing boat, but gets his just desserts when he falls overboard. The film is appropriately titled, as Warners had just invested in a new billowing smoke machine, which worked overtime throughout the shoot.

For many, *High Sierra* marked the end of an era for gangster cinema. With the coming of the Second World War, the nation was preoccupied with the occupation of Europe and the Far East. The *New York Times*, in their review of *High Sierra*, summed it up best. 'We wouldn't know for certain whether the twilight of the American gangster is here, but the Warner Brothers have apparently taken it for granted and, in solemn Wagnerian mood, are giving that titanic figure a send-off befitting a first-string god. It's a wonder the American flag wasn't wrapped around his broken corpse.' And of course, in keeping with Warners' history, he went out with a bang.

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